

United States Department of Agriculture

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

Program Aid No. 1534

Importing a Pet Bird

Special Rules for Bringing
Pet Birds Into the
United States



The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has special rules for bringing pet birds into the United States from foreign countries. A pet bird is any bird except poultry that is kept for its owner's pleasure and is not for resale. (Commercial shipments of birds are imported under different rules than personally owned pet birds.) Poultry—even if kept as a pet—is brought into the country and quarantined under separate requirements than other species of birds. In addition to chickens and turkeys, USDA considers pheasants, partridge, ducks, geese, swans, quail, pigeons, and peafowl to be poultry under its importation rules.

Why Are Special Rules for Pet Birds Necessary?

Serious diseases of birds and poultry can be carried by pet birds entering this country. For example, parrots from South America are believed to have caused an outbreak of exotic Newcastle disease in southern California in the early 1970's. Eradicating this disease outbreak cost \$56 million over a 3-year period. During that outbreak, more than 12 million birds were destroyed, the vast majority of which were commercial poultry. Because this exotic Newcastle outbreak demonstrated that imported pet birds can carry communicable diseases of poultry, USDA developed importation rules for quarantining pet birds to help prevent the introduction of such highly contagious diseases into the United States.

Import Procedures

To bring your pet bird from a foreign country into the United States, you must:

- **Reserve quarantine space at a USDA animal import facility.** Birds arriving for entry at these facilities without advance reservations will generally be refused. Also, please note that young birds that need to be hand-fed cannot be accepted for quarantine because removing them daily from the special isolation cages used at USDA quarantine facilities could interfere with the biological security of the facility.

To reserve quarantine space, write to the USDA port veterinarian at the port of entry where you intend to arrive and request Veterinary Services (VS) Form 17–23. Complete this form and return it to the same port-of-entry address.

Pet birds must enter the United States through one of the following ports of entry:

Honolulu, HI

Port Veterinarian
3375 Koapaka Street
Suite H420
Honolulu, HI 96819
Telephone (808) 861–8560
Telefax (808) 861–8570

Miami, FL

Port Veterinarian
P.O. Box 660657
Miami Springs, FL 33266
Telephone (305) 526–2926
Telefax (305) 526–2929

Los Angeles, CA

Port Veterinarian
9680 South La Cienega Boulevard
Inglewood, CA 90301
Telephone (310) 215–2352
Telefax (310) 215–1314

New York, NY

Port Veterinarian
JFK International Airport
Cargo Building 77, Room 116
Jamaica, NY 11430
Telephone (718) 553–1727
Telefax (718) 553–7543

McAllen, TX

Port Veterinarian
320 North Main Street
Room 135
McAllen, TX 78501
Telephone (210) 687–8314
Telefax (210) 687–1267

San Ysidro, CA

Port Veterinarian
P.O. Box 126
San Ysidro, CA 92073
Telephone (310) 215–2352
Telefax (310) 215–1314

(All California reservations are made in Los Angeles.)

- **Pay USDA the total quarantine fee at the time you make reservations.** This fee covers the costs of quarantining and examining your bird. The port veterinarian will provide a cost estimate in advance. Current costs for the 30-day quarantine are approximately \$200 per bird. Testing is covered under an additional user fee. You must include a check or money order made payable to USDA for the quarantine fee when you return the completed reservation forms.
- **Obtain a health certificate from the exporting country.** This certificate should be signed by a national government veterinarian and should state that the bird has been examined, shows no evidence of communicable diseases of poultry, and is being exported in accordance with the laws of that country. The foreign veterinary official must sign the certificate within 30 days of the time that the bird is shipped to the United States. If the health certificate is not in English, you must provide a translation. VS Form 17–23 includes an acceptable health certificate in English.

Note: In addition to health certificates, all species of birds to be allowed into the United States at any port must arrive with the appropriate documents from the Department of the Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the exporting country. See section on FWS regulations in this brochure.

Also, because certain States administer their own regulations to protect wildlife and animal health, you should contact appropriate State officials when making importation arrangements to learn of any necessary State requirements.

- **Transport your bird and all necessary documentation to the import facility where you have reserved quarantine space.** We recommend that, if available, you hire a private company or U.S. customs broker to move your bird from the port of entry to the USDA import facility. Upon arriving at the facility, your bird will be transferred to a special isolation cage. Your transport cage must be removed from the premises because USDA animal import facilities do not have the space to store privately owned cages.

The Quarantine Period

Your bird will remain in quarantine for at least 30 days. USDA–APHIS veterinarians and other employees will care for your bird during this time. Pet birds are kept in air-filtered isolation cages to prevent the possible spread of disease within the import facility. Food and water are always readily available. To minimize the risk of birds being carriers of psittacosis, a bacterial disease that can cause flulike symptoms in humans, the feed provided in quarantine is lightly medicated.

APHIS veterinarians will test your bird during the quarantine period to ensure that it is free of communicable diseases of poultry. Unfortunately, if your bird is found to be infected with such a disease, it will not be allowed to enter the United States. If this should happen, you can choose to have your bird humanely destroyed or pay for its return to the country of origin.

Smuggled Birds Can Carry Exotic Diseases

Since 1972, most outbreaks of exotic Newcastle disease in cage and aviary birds appear to have been caused by birds entering the United States illegally. Smuggled birds present a persistent health threat to all domesticated birds in the United States because they can carry communicable diseases without appearing sick.

As a birdowner, you should know the signs of exotic Newcastle disease. In hookbilled birds, such as parrots, this devastating disease may cause infected birds to die suddenly or to show a slight or marked depression followed by neurological signs (e.g., tremors). Because this disease is highly contagious, you should isolate newly purchased birds for at least a month. If you should have a sudden die-off in your aviary, contact your local veterinarian or animal health official immediately. Put all dead birds into plastic bags and refrigerate them for submission to a diagnostic laboratory. Handle any sick or dead birds carefully as the exotic Newcastle virus can cause transitory eye infections in people.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Rules

Illegal trafficking in wild-caught birds is also a threat to the wild populations of endangered and threatened birds in their countries of origin. Under the Wild Bird Conservation Act (WBCA) of 1992, FWS is enforcing regulations for importing bird species protected by the treaty of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). All parrotlike birds (macaws, cockatoos, parakeets, lorries, etc.) except the budgie and cockatiel are protected by CITES.

Although these regulations are aimed at conserving wild birds in their native habitats, you as a pet bird owner are affected by the WBCA in the following ways:

- **Before leaving the United States with your pet bird, you must obtain a CITES export permit from FWS.** Getting this permit before exporting your bird will save you time and energy because you will not be required to obtain a WBCA import permit to bring your bird back into the United States. However, you will need to obtain a CITES reexport permit from the country you visited before returning your bird to the United States.

- **In order to import a pet bird acquired outside of the United States, you must obtain an import permit under the WBCA.** To qualify for an import permit, you must have continuously resided outside of the United States for at least 1 year. The WBCA limits to two the number of pet birds that can be imported per individual. In addition to the WBCA import permit, you must also obtain a CITES export permit from the bird's country of origin, if appropriate.

To request CITES and WBCA permit applications and to obtain more information concerning importing and exporting pet birds, contact the FWS Office of Management Authority. The address is 4401 North Fairfax Drive, Room 420, Arlington, VA 22203. The toll-free telephone number is 1-800-358-2104. Overseas calls should be placed to (703) 358-2104.

Although USDA-APHIS is working in cooperation with FWS to help prevent birds from being smuggled into the United States, an estimated 25,000 birds enter the country in this manner every year. As a wary consumer, you can discourage smuggling by purchasing birds from reputable sources and reporting any suspicious activity to APHIS or any FWS office.

Special Exemptions From USDA Quarantine Requirements

- Birdowners who take their pets with them while traveling abroad are generally exempted from the USDA quarantine and foreign certification requirements. This exception applies only to U.S.-origin birds and is permitted as long as the owner makes special arrangements in advance.

If you wish to take your bird abroad, you must obtain all necessary USDA and FWS documents before departing the United States. Such preparation is especially critical for birds covered by CITES. You must get a health certificate signed by a USDA-accredited veterinarian, and you and your veterinarian should make certain that your bird is identified with a tattoo or numbered legband and that this identification is recorded on the certificate.

While abroad, you must keep your pet bird separate from other birds. You must also make arrangements to have your bird inspected upon its return by a USDA-APHIS veterinarian. This inspection will be subject to a user fee. You may bring your bird through any of the six ports of entry approved for birds or to any international

airport that can be serviced by a USDA veterinary official. For more information, contact USDA–APHIS–VS at 4700 River Road, Riverdale, MD 20737. The telephone number is (301) 734–5097.

- Pet birds coming to the United States from Canada are also exempt from quarantine requirements because that country's animal and bird health status and importation requirements are similar to those of the United States.

If you plan to bring a pet bird into the United States from Canada by car, you must arrange for a veterinary inspection at a USDA-designated land border station. You must provide the APHIS veterinarian at the station with a signed statement available at the time of the inspection. In this statement, you must certify that your bird has been in your possession for at least 90 days, has been kept separate from other birds, and is healthy.

If you are shipping your bird to the United States from Canada by air, your bird must be inspected by an APHIS veterinarian at a USDA-designated port of entry for air shipments of animals and animal products or at an international airport. You must make advance arrangements for this inspection, which also requires a user fee.

Contact the VS National Center for Import/Export at 4700 River Road, Riverdale, MD 20737, for current information about ports of entry. The telephone number is (301) 734–5097.

Note: Birds from Canada or pet birds of U.S. origin that have traveled abroad with their owners are not exempt from FWS permit requirements under the Endangered Species Act and the WBCA.



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To file a complaint, write the Secretary of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC 20250, or call (800) 245-6340 (voice) or (202) 720-1127 (TDD). USDA is an equal employment opportunity employer.

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